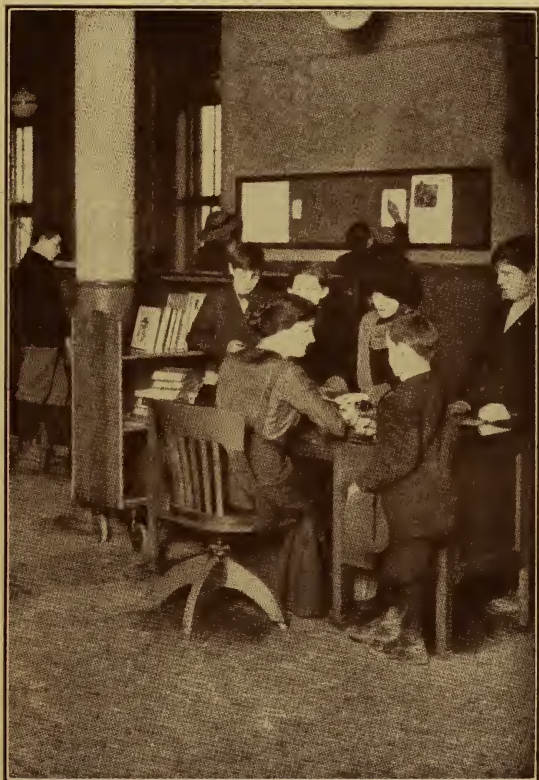


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Bob and Elizabeth.

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H. W. Wilson

The Library Adventures of Bob and Elizabeth

Marie Louise Prevost, Assistant Librarian
Free Public Library, Elizabeth, N. J.



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The Library Adventures of Bob and Elizabeth

Pooh!" said Bob. "It doesn't."
"But sister said the lady said it did," re-
turned Elizabeth staunchly.

"Dare me to find out?" queried Bob.

"Yes," laughed Elizabeth, and across the
street and into the Library building dashed the
two cousins, Bob remembering just in time to
pull off his cap as they entered the children's
room. "Please," said he to the lady who was
standing near the desk, "the Library doesn't
belong to us, does it?"

"Why, yes," said the lady, "if you live here.
It belongs to everyone living in town." Then
noticing Bob's puzzled expression she added,
"Just as your home belongs to you and to
everyone else in the family too. You know the
Library is just a big book home for the big
family that all the citizens make."

"And that's the reason we have to take care
of the books, because we wouldn't like it if our
brothers and sisters broke the furniture and
spoiled the garden," said Elizabeth. You see
her sister had been quite enthusiastic and Eliza-
beth had a good memory.

The lady smiled pleasantly. "You seem to know all about it though I don't remember your being here before."

"No, this is the first time we've come," replied Elizabeth, and Bob added, grinning, "We thought it was time we looked after our property!"

The lady saw the joke and smiled back. Then she told them just what they had to do to get their cards and what the children's hours were and as they started to go, for it was nearly closing time, she added, "And I hope you are going to get well acquainted with your new property very soon."

"If Elizabeth has anything to do with it, I guess we will," said Bob. "She's always been a book-worm," and they both laughed softly (as one must in libraries) and ran out together. Bob and Elizabeth had always been chums.

Sure enough it was Elizabeth who reached the Library first on the following day though it was hardly Bob's fault. He had to stop and see some of the fellows after school about Saturday's ball game and that takes time.

Elizabeth found the lady in the children's room busier than she had been the day before and while waiting her turn to speak to her she watched what was going on at the desk.

First there was a boy who was getting books for his teacher to use in school. He brought a note and when the lady had read it

she said that one of the books was out but as soon as it came in she would let Miss Brown know and keep it for her. Elizabeth wondered if this was where her teacher got the stories they read to make the geography lesson so much more interesting and, later, she found out that it was.

Next came another boy who wanted to see some books about baseball but the lady could not let him have them because his hands were too dirty. He had forgotten to wash them after sliding for a base on the diamond so he had to go out now and come back later for what he wanted.

After that came an older girl who had to pay a fine because she had left her book where the baby could reach and tear it. The lady said it would take half an hour to mend it and then it would never look really nice again.

And last in line before Elizabeth was a little girl who looked as though she had been crying.

She said she had lost her card and her book had been due day before yesterday and she was afraid to bring it back without the card. Elizabeth had been wondering what would happen if she lost her card, so she listened with interest.

"You mustn't be afraid to bring a book back, ever," the lady was saying, "because you have to pay a fine for every day you keep it overtime. You'd better go home and get it."

"But I haven't got the money now," sobbed the little girl.

"Never mind," said the lady. "Bring the book back today and the fine will not grow any bigger if you don't pay it till next week or even next year. Run home now for the book and perhaps if you look a little harder you may find the card."

Then it was Elizabeth's turn and when she had gotten her card the lady showed her how to find the books in the low cases along the walls. "Here," she said, "is the fiction, the make-believe, made-up stories. They are put on the shelves according to the authors' names, like the alphabet, A's first, B's next, C's next and so on. And here is the non-fiction, as we call the true stories, books about real people and places, about animals and birds and flowers and games and pictures and how to make things."

Elizabeth was fond of learning pieces to recite so she thought of something the lady had not mentioned.

"Which is poetry?" she asked.

"I don't wonder you ask," said the lady, "because it certainly is often make-believe, but we put it with the non-fiction over here and just before it are the books on drawing and painting. If you like pictures you will love some of these that tell of beautiful paintings by the great artists."

Elizabeth thought she would like them but

she was more interested in the poetry just now. "I wish I could find the funny piece a girl said in school the other day," she said, "but I guess there's no use wishing because I don't know its name."

"What do you know about it?"

"Just that it begins: 'The gingham dog and the calico cat side by side on the table sat.'"

"Oh," said the lady, "that is easy because we have a book that tells us what thousands of recitations are by their first lines. But I happen to remember this one without looking. It is called 'The Duel' and is right here in this book by Eugene Field."

Then the lady had to go back to her desk and after Elizabeth had read the poem through she went back to the shelves to find something else.

"Hullo, Elizabeth! What are you looking for?"

Elizabeth turned to find her big sister standing behind her.

"I was looking to see if they have 'Little Women' but it's not here so I guess they haven't."

"Oh yes, they have!" said her sister. "It's just out, probably."

"How can you tell that?" asked Elizabeth.

"Well, you could ask the lady but it's nicer to find out for yourself. Come here and I'll show you," and they walked over to a case full

of little drawers that Elizabeth's sister called the catalog.

"There are cards in here for all the books the Library owns. The cards are put in like the alphabet, A's, B's, C's, D's ——"

"Just like the story books over there," interrupted Elizabeth.

"Yes, but sometimes there are three cards for one book, one card with the name of the book first, one card with the name of the author first, and one with what it's about first."

"What's that for?"

"So you can find a book if you only know one thing about it. Suppose you didn't know who wrote 'Little Women'—I'd be ashamed of you if you didn't, but just suppose—where would you look for it?"

"In the drawer that has the L's in it, I guess," said Elizabeth and she looked at the little labels outside the drawers and read the letters on them. "A to B, C to D, E to I, J to M, J. K. L.—this must be it," opened the drawer, turned over the cards till she came to the L's and read: "'Little Sunshine's holiday,' 'Little travellers around the world'—here it is 'Little women: Alcott, Louisa May.' Now I know the author and can find the book over there where the A's begin."

"And suppose you wanted some more books by Miss Alcott but didn't know their names?"

"Oh, I see now!" said Elizabeth. "I'd go to

the drawer with the A's in it," and she pulled it out as she spoke. "Abbot—um um—Alcott: Eight cousins; next card, Alcott: Jo's boys; next card, Alcott: Little men; Alcott: Little women; Alcott: Rose in bloom. Why, it's ever so easy when you know how, isn't it?"

"Yes, and the third card's the most useful of all sometimes. If you wanted a book about Christmas but didn't know the names or the writers of any, the catalog would find that for you, too."

Elizabeth pulled open the C drawer and sure enough there under Christmas was card after card giving the names of books about that pleasant time. Crothers, "Miss Muffet's Christmas party"; Dier, "Children's book of Christmas"; Miller, "Kristy's queer Christmas"; Page, "Captured Santa Claus," and many more.

"It's just like a game," said Elizabeth and she ran off to practice finding as she called it.

Now Bob after he had left the other boys walked on down to the Library in a somewhat bothered frame of mind. It was about that debate they were going to have at school, the first one in which he and two of his especial friends had ever taken part. Father had promised them a treat if their side won but Bob was very doubtful of their doing so. Why he himself could think of three reasons for the affirmative side and of only one for the negative side which was theirs.

"It's mean to be put on the side that hasn't any reasons," he said to himself. "It isn't fair!" and he pulled open the Library door feeling rather glum. That treat of Father's certainly did look miles away!

The lady wasn't at her desk. She was standing talking to another boy evidently about a big book that was lying open on a table. "No," she was saying as Bob drew nearer, "an encyclopedia is different from a dictionary. A dictionary contains all the single words in the language. It tells us what they mean and how to spell them and what other words and languages they came from. But an encyclopedia tells us all about anything we want to know. It is just thousands of little stories about things and events and places and people, all following after one another."

"No wonder it's a big book!" said the little boy.

"Oh, it's a great many volumes!" said the lady. "This one came from that shelf where the other ones in the same binding are. You wanted to know something about flying machines so I got the volume with CIR-GAT on the back. That means that this volume starts with the words that begin with C-I-R and goes on through the C's and D's and E's and F's and G's as far as the words beginning with G-A-T, and we were looking for the F's for flying machines."

"Seems like everything in this place was 'ranged in alphabetical order," said the little boy.

"Just about," said the lady smiling.

Then Bob joined in. "Would there be anything in that about our debate?" he asked.

"Look and see," said the lady, "and if you don't find what you need come and tell me and I'll show you where else to look for your subject and some books on debating too."

Ten minutes later Bob closed the big volume feeling a lot more cheerful.

"Two reasons already," he said to himself, "and tomorrow I'll ask her about those other books. Gee, this is something like!" and he got up to put the encyclopedia back on the shelf. As he did so a hand grasped his shoulder, a piece of paper was waved under his nose and a voice said in his ear:

"They were all doing the same!"

It was his friend Dick who was also on the debating (as well as the ball) team. Dick was red-headed and merry and talked about a mile a minute, so Bob did not have to ask what he had been doing. He went right on without stopping.

"I came in and asked her if there was anything good on our side and she said 'Have you tried the magazines?' and I said it wasn't in Saint Nicholas or Something to Do and I didn't know what others to try, there were so many of

them, it would take too long. And she said "Oh, you look it up in the index first!" and I said to myself 'Lead on, madam, you've got me!' and she did lead on to some big books with Readers' Guide on the outside and turned the pages till she struck our subject and showed me the list of magazine articles under it. I copied the names and dates of four of them on this paper and you've got to read half. She said I could find the articles by their names and authors too, but the subject way was good enough for me!"

"Go it!" said Bob, grinning, as Dick paused for breath.

"Sure enough, when I've got a good thing to go on!" said Dick, "But so long, now—and don't you forget you have to read two of them," and with a parting wave of his paper Dick was gone.

"There seems to be some use in a Library, after all," said Bob to himself. "I thought it was only books to read, but it's a regular question-answerer instead. Hullo! There's Elizabeth over there in that corner, glued to a book. Bet she won't see me if I get one myself and sit down next her."

Bob looked over several books, decided that "The Master of the Strong Hearts" and "Midshipman Farragut" looked pretty good, carried them over to Elizabeth's table and sat down opposite her without so much as causing her to wink an eye-lash. He only meant to sit quiet a

few moments to tease her but almost before he knew it he was deep in the adventures of Jack Huntington and his Indian friend, Young Wolf, for "The Master of the Strong Hearts" is a story of Custer's last rally and is as full of Indians and excitement as a boy could wish. For about three-quarters of an hour he sat about as still as a boy can be, not paying attention to anything else. Coming by that time to the end of a particularly thrilling chapter, he looked up to make Elizabeth enjoy it with him.

"Gee, Elizabeth," he whispered, "you ought to read this; he wasn't a bit afraid of that big chief, Sitting Bull!"

But Elizabeth did not hear, for she was quite lost in a story that began by showing how all little girls were really princesses and went on to tell all the wonderful and interesting things that happened in "The Princess and the Goblin" to one little princess and her friend Curdie in the goblin's palace way down in the under world.

Now these are only the very beginning of the Library adventures of Bob and Elizabeth. They are still going on and piling up bright memories at the rate of a new one every time they enter the Library doors. And because every good thing in the world is to be found and learned about and enjoyed through books, there is no reason why these happy experiences should not go on all their lives long.

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